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## Naval Hospital Bremerton Sailors Selected for Medical Commissioning Programs

BY VJOHNSON – MARCH 6, 2014

POSTED IN: NEWS

By Douglas H Stutz, Naval Hospital Bremerton Public Affairs

The Navy’s Nurse Corps and Medical Service Corps gained new members courtesy of Naval Hospital Bremerton (NHB) as a trio of enlisted staff members were announced being selected for medical commissioning programs on Feb. 21, 2014.

“Our three Sailors here have demonstrated sustained superior performance. This is a very competitive process. We are very proud they can further their education, get a commission and continue on to bigger and better things as part of Navy Medicine,” said Capt. Christopher Quarles, NHB Commanding Officer.



Chief Hospital Corpsman Shawn Kenney, Director of Medical Services leading chief petty officer, confers on clinical assignments in Naval Hospital Bremerton’s Pediatrics Department with Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Jason Holyoak and Hospitalman Apprentice Lauren Tharp before the morning appointments commence. Kenney will be attending the Interserv Physician Assistance Program located at Ft. Sam Houston after being accepted to the Navy’s medical commissioning progr



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Hospital Corpsman Chief (Surface Warfare/Fleet Marine Force) Shawn Kenney, Director of Medical Services Leading Chief Petty Officer, will be attending the Interservice Physician Assistance Program, and Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Taylor Lee Smith, assistant leading petty officer for NHB's Oral Surgery Clinic, and Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Tara MacDonald, NHB's Branch Health Clinic Bangor Information Assurance Officer and Immunizations assistant leading petty officer, will both enroll in the Medical Enlisted Commissioning Program (MECP) for Nursing. "We had the three apply and they all were selected. Obviously batting a thousand is great, but what really made this program a success is not just that the Sailors are outstanding, but that the command was outstanding to help them achieve their goals," said Cmdr. David Thomas, NHB Medical Services deputy director and a prime architect of the command's annual Medical Commissioning Programs Symposium.



Dental charts and dental records are all part of the daily round of providing support to patients in Naval Hospital Bremerton's Oral Surgery Clinic for Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Taylor Lee Smith, assistant leading petty officer for the clinic. Smith was recently selected for the Navy's Medical Enlisted Commissioning Program (MECP) for nursing and will depart later this year for college to complete all the requirements to become a Navy Nurse Corps officer. (Photo by Douglas H Stutz, NHB Public Affairs)

Thomas attests that having the backing of the command, especially from the Chief's Mess, to help mentor and tutor the Sailors throughout the process is a valuable resource that can't be understated.

"The Sailors we assisted are all top-notch and they are going to become top-notch officers," stated Thomas.

"Becoming a physician assistant has been a goal of mine for years," said Kenney. With over 19 years in the Navy, the Victorville, Calif. native, will detach from NHB in the summer for 16 months at the Interservice Physician Assistance Program at Ft. Sam Houston on Joint Base San

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Antonio, Texas, followed by another 14 months of clinical rotations at Naval Medical Center San Diego.

Kenney notes that two of the most important aspects of being selected are centered on being a top-notch professional and a willing student in higher education.

“As Skipper said, a person has to demonstrate ‘sustained superior performance’ in their duties. A person also needs to have the necessary academic backing – a grade point average of 3.5 or higher – in science-based courses to back up the package they submit,” Kenney said, who has served as an independent duty corpsman and Fleet Marine Force from ship to shore to down range as an Individual Augmentee. He has accumulated medical experience serving on the frigate USS Taylor (FFG 50), at Branch Health Clinic Bangor, and Forward Operating Base Inkerman in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

“With my IDC and FMF background, I know what to do when someone is in front of me and needs hands-on medical assistance. By becoming a PA, I will further enhance my background knowledge in being able to provide more in-depth medical care. I got a ways to go, but I’m on the way,” Kenney said, also noting that even though the qualifications are stringent for any medical commissioning program, if he can do it, so can others. “I’m proof that anyone can do it. A person has to be patient, thorough and stick with it. I also had two people – Cmdr. Thomas and HMC Gil Garcia – help in tracking my progress, setting up boards, organizing the package and much more. Both of them were a huge help. I can’t say enough how valuable they were to me, as was the entire command,” said Kenney.

For Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Taylor Lee Smith, from Knoxville, Iowa, his path to pursue a medical commission in the Navy Nurse Corps was driven by his commitment to aid others in need.

“I have a passion for helping people. I look up to Navy Nurses and this also is one of the ways to continue to help others after I retire,” explained Smith, who knew he wanted to follow the medical commission path when he was stationed at Captain James A. Lovell Federal Health Care Center, Great Lakes, Ill, in 2012.

Smith, with approximately five and half years in the Navy, advises others not to simply talk the talk if they’re not actually walking the walk.

“Don’t just say you are going to do it. Start the process and do it! I said for six months that I was going to and never did. Then Lt. Lanae Hickman guided me along the way for the most part and gave me all the instructions and the direction that I needed to get going and to not stop until I was selected,” related Smith, adding that the most difficult aspect was accomplishing the required personal statement for the package.

“I think the personal statement was the hardest. You only get 250 words to explain why you want (to become a Navy Nurse Corps officer) and I started off with pages of reasons. It took months to perfect it. The wait was also stressful,” Smith said, sharing that the entire process was gratifying by knowing he had taken a huge step forward in his career by undertaking the process and being accepted. Like Kenney, the process was one he could not have done without tutoring and mentoring along the way, from Lt. Hickman at Great Lakes to Cmdr. Thomas, Lt. Cmdr. Carmelo Ayala, and Lt. Sheila Phillips at NHB.

MacDonald has been stationed at BHC Bangor for most of her approximately three years in the Navy. Soon after checking onboard, she began the process of applying to become a Navy nurse.

“I’m going into nursing, possibly Nurse Practitioner. I began looking into MECP about three



months after I checked onboard Bangor. I immediately contacted Cmdr. Fran Slonski at NHB (then Quality Management department head) and she got me started on my package,” MacDonald shared, adding that she applied initially in 2013 and was selected as an alternate and then reapplied for 2014.



Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Tara MacDonald, Naval Hospital Bremerton's Branch Health Clinic Bangor information assurance officer and Immunizations assistant leading petty officer, carries out her infection prevention duties as part of overall clinical possibilities in ensuring patient care equipment is thoroughly wiped down with a disinfectant after every use. Such hands-on experiences are not only second-nature to MacDonald on the job, but also helped bolster her package when applying for the Medical Enlisted Commissioning Program (MECP) for Nursing.

"I started the process by looking up the instruction and finding out exactly what I needed to do. There was a lot of paperwork involved along with contacting nursing programs and fulfilling their requirements as well. Cmdr. Slonski and Lt. Cmdr. Katie May (BHC Bangor Nurse) helped me with the package," said MacDonald, from Westmoreland, Tenn. MacDonald says that the best advice she can share with others preparing to apply to MECP, or any future goal, is to work hard and always strive to do the best in handling responsibilities. "Every little thing counted towards this package, from physical readiness test scores and evaluations to science classes I took years ago," MacDonald noted, adding that the most difficult part of putting her package together was trying to find a nursing school that would allow an early acceptance for the next fall semester. Fortunately, she already had an AAS (Associate of Applied Science) degree in Pre-

Nursing which proved to be very helpful in that regard.

MacDonald commented that she has been working towards her BSN since high school, but due to financial issues and having to support herself through college, there were some detours. Yet she has persisted.

“The most rewarding thing about being selected for this program is knowing that all the hard work I’ve done has paid off. I’m finally getting the chance to go back to school and start my career as a nurse! I received so much advice from so many people, but I have to say that without Cmdr. Slonski and Lt. Cmdr. May, I would not have been able to submit the best package that I could put together in time for the cut-off date. Also, my chain of command, and Hospital Corpsman Senior Chief Joseph Haner specifically, supported my future aspirations to join the Nurse Corps from the very beginning,” MacDonald exclaimed.

There are others getting ready to follow the trio of Kenney, Smith and MacDonald. At the 2nd annual NHB Medical Commissioning Programs Symposium recently held Jan. 29, 2014, the ranks of those in attendance swelled to listen to the extensive information provided on the Navy’s many officer commissioning opportunities in medical health science fields.

Subject matter experts all provided extensive information on the Seaman to Admiral (STA-21) program, Medical Enlisted Commissioning Program (MECP) for Nursing, as well as opportunities and information on other scholarship programs including medical school commissioning pathway(s) via scholarship from the Uniformed Services University for the Health Sciences (USUHS), the Health Professionals Scholarship Program (HPSP), and the Medical Services Corps Inservice Procurement Program (MSC-IPP) with an emphasis on physician’s assistant and health care administration track, and dental school commissioning pathway.

The Medical Enlisted Commissioning Program (MECP) that Smith and MacDonald have been accepted gives enlisted Sailors in the Navy an opportunity to earn an entry level degree in nursing and be appointed as a Navy Nurse Corps officer. To be considered for the program a Sailor must meet the minimum requirements and submit an application package to Naval Medical Education and Training Command.

### **The minimum requirements for the Medical Enlisted Commissioning Program (MECP) are:**

U.S. Citizenship (No Waivers); Opened to all rates and rank; Applicant must be commissioned prior/before reaching their 42nd birthday (No Waivers); No high school transcripts are required; At least 19 years of age; A minimum of 30 semester hours (or 45 quarter hours) of undergraduate courses accepted for transfer towards a bachelor’s degree in nursing (BSN) by the institution(s) for which you are applying. Courses such as English, Psychology, Biology, Chemistry, Physiology, etc. are desirable; Cumulative GPA of at least 2.5 on a 4.0 scale; SAT or ACT test taken within the past 3 years from application due date; Must complete all requirements for a BSN within 36 months or less; No history of felony conviction or any record of drug abuse. A driving under the influence (DUI/DWI) violation is disqualifying if within four years of the application deadline, or convicted of any misdemeanors (except minor traffic violations) within three years of the application deadline; Have no record of courts-martial convictions or civilian felony convictions; Security Clearance, contact your Security Management Office. JPAS (**Joint Personnel Adjudication System**) security investigation printout is acceptable; Favorable endorsement from commanding officer; Once accepted in the program a candidate will have to extend as an enlisted Sailor to cover the period of training and must serve a minimum of 10 years as an officer to be eligible for retirement pay.

Kenney will enter the United States Military’s Interservice Physician Assistant Program that is designed to train service members both active duty and reserve, from all branches of the U.S. military, to become Physician’s Assistants.

The program offers approximately 150 candidates per year the opportunity to enter the comprehensive program with candidates are drawn from the Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force, Army, U.S. Army Reserve, National Guard and the U.S. Public Health service.

Basic qualifications for IPAP include:

Must be Active Army, Reserve, National Guard (officer, warrant officer, enlisted) ROTC cadet, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corp or Public Health Service (prior occupational specialty is not a determining factor in eligibility)

Must be physically qualified for service retention and be within the height/weight guidelines of Army Regulations

Must meet time in service requirements (three years active federal service by August 30 of the year following application).

Must be U.S. Citizens

Must have a sound understanding and ability to speak and write in English.

In lieu of having a BA degree, applicant must have at minimum 60 hours of transferable credits from an accredited institution of higher learning, 30 of which must have been earned in-residence. Any applicable anatomy, science, physiology courses must have been completed within the past five years or applicant will be subject to having to repeat these courses. These courses must have been completed with assigned letter grades to be considered acceptable for program purposes.

Must meet GPA requirements

Must have completed minimum credit hours in humanities, English, chemistry, anatomy, physiology, algebra (or higher math) and psychology

Once in the program, candidates are expected to maintain a minimum GPA of no lower than a “C” during the didactic (coursework) first phase of training and successfully complete phase 2, the clinical component. Each phase lasts approximately 53 weeks.



About vjohnson